

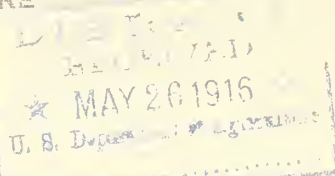
Historic, Archive Document

Do not assume content reflects current scientific knowledge, policies, or practices.

MAY '16.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
BUREAU OF BIOLOGICAL SURVEY

INSTRUCTIONS IN REGARD TO SALTING SKINS.



Skins of mammals and birds which can not well be made up in the field, because of difficulties of transportation or because too fat to be prepared properly without laboratory facilities may be preserved with fine table salt.

Specimens preserved in this way should be skinned with the same care as if to be finished by the collector. The limbs should be carefully skinned out, and in mammals the ears and lips should be carefully skinned, the soles should be split, and a series of short slits made on the underside of the tail, to facilitate curing. In general, large series of any common species should not be taken unless they can be made up in the field, as in many cases the work of making them up from salted material is out of proportion to their value.

In very exceptional cases, for example, when the collector is traveling on foot or with pack animals in remote regions where time and space are at a great premium and the specimens especially valuable, any of the rules here laid down, except those referring to care in preparation, may be disregarded, since it is obviously desirable in such cases to save as many specimens as possible.

MAMMALS:

Because of the time necessary to make up specimens of small mammals, as mice and chipmunks, which have been salted and dried, it is almost never permissible to preserve them by salting. It is usually necessary, however, from lack of space to salt all mammals larger than woodchucks, whatever their condition. Skunks, minks, and raccoons are commonly so fat that it is hardly possible to prepare them properly in the field. Ground squirrels, if very fat, may be salted, but if in good condition should be made up by the collector. When salted, the specimens saved should be carefully selected, mostly adults in good condition, and should not include an undue proportion of young animals, as these often cost more to prepare than they are worth. Pine squirrels, flying squirrels, woodrats, kangaroo rats, weasels, chipmunks, and others of this size should in all cases be made up by the collector. Rabbits, except in extremely exceptional circumstances, should also be made up in the field. A rabbit skin prepared for stuffing may be finished in from ten to twenty minutes, but if salted and dried it may require half a day of the taxidermist's time, and if it becomes too dry may even then make but an indifferent specimen. A small, well-selected series, made up in the field, is obviously preferable to larger series of poor specimens procured at an exorbitant cost.

All skins, after being well treated with salt, should be rolled up fur side out with the head and feet folded inside. Some prefer to keep the smaller skins buried in the preservative in a bag or box, to guard against loss. After being salted for a day they should be examined to make sure that the salt has reached all parts of the skin and that the process of curing is under way, and if necessary more fat should be removed and the skins resalted. Large skins, especially of bears, may require a longer time to cure. All large skins and most small ones should be dried before being shipped; the drying should be done in the shade and without the application of heat. While drying small skins it is a good plan to string a number of them together, preferably by a cord run through the eye and mouth, to guard against loss.

The skin of the feet should never be reversed as this causes displacement of the short fur which can never be corrected. When partially dried skins should be folded in a compact form to save space.

LABELING:

Skull tags should be marked on one side only. Never use "indelible" pencil. Only carbon ink or a sharp, No. 2 (medium soft), lead pencil should be used on skull tags. When using ink, numbers and other items on tags should be written moderately heavy and the ink allowed to dry without blotting. Ink should never be used on tags which have become greasy or wet; if it becomes necessary to use such tags, numbers should be made heavily with a lead pencil. Tags and labels for skulls not accompanied by skins should be marked "Odd"; labels for skins without skulls should be marked "No skull"; labels for alcoholics should be marked "Alcoholics." All information of this character should also be entered in the remarks column in the catalog. Embryos should receive the same catalog number as the parent.

Great care should be taken to label all salted skins and skulls (which should not be salted) with a strong tag bearing the catalog number and initials of the collector. The permanent labels should be written as for made-up skins and sent in separately. The name of the genus should be written lightly in pencil on the back of the label.

BIRDS:

Small birds should be made up by the collector in all cases. If common species, the labor of making them up from salt is usually out of proportion to their value. If rare, the superior results obtained by finishing the skins while fresh will suggest this course.

Medium-sized birds, if very fat, may in some cases be salted, but if not fat should be made up. Small owls, hawks, crows, jays, and woodpeckers should be made up; indeed the labor of making up all owls and hawks when salted, because of the extra work involved in drying the down and feathers, scarcely ever justifies this method. On the other hand, ducks, geese, and water birds in general, if fat, may be salted, as the superior results obtained by finishing them in the laboratory usually justifies the extra work.

Birds which are to be salted should be carefully skinned. In those which require a cut in the skin to allow removal of the head, this cut should be made at the back of the head, not on the side or on the throat; it should be only large enough to remove the head. After the fat skin has been salted a day or two the bulk of the fat may easily be scraped off; a few minutes work at this time will facilitate the curing of the skin and may save an hour's work later. After this the skin should again be salted. When sufficiently cured and ready to be dried a little stuffing, preferably tow, should be put in the neck and body to keep the inner surfaces of the skin apart. The wings, legs, and tail, and the feathers, especially of the head and neck, should be disposed as smoothly as possible to prevent them from becoming set in unnatural positions. This precaution is especially necessary if the skin is to be dried before being sent in. Birds should not be buried in salt or carried in bags as this injures the plumage. The same precautions as to tagging salted skins recommended for mammals should be adopted in the case of birds.

